

Fiscal Estimate Narratives

GAB 12/28/2011

LRB Number	11-2584/1	Introduction Number	SB-298	Estimate Type	Original
Description Enclosure of absentee ballots in privacy envelopes					

Assumptions Used in Arriving at Fiscal Estimate

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Assumptions Used in Arriving at Fiscal Estimate:

Currently, Wisconsin law requires a municipal clerk to respond to a qualified voter's request for an absentee ballot by mailing the voter an envelope that contains the ballot, instructions and an Absentee Certificate Envelope in which to return the voted ballot. This legislation requires municipal clerks to provide absentee voters with an additional "privacy envelope." The voter seals the voted ballot in the privacy envelope, and the privacy envelope containing the ballot is placed into the Absentee Certificate Envelope. The Absentee Certificate envelope is returned to the municipal clerk.

2011 Act 23 made significant changes to absentee voting with respect to proof of identification requirements. The Act imposed varying ID requirements on absentee voters, depending on the voter's circumstances or the method by which the absentee ballot is requested. This necessitated revisions to absentee ballot forms and materials.

Absentee Certificate Envelope:

In order for clerks to track a voter's compliance with the proof of identification requirements and to alert election inspectors if ID is required to be included with the returned ballot or if other special requirements apply, the Absentee Certificate Envelope had to be revised significantly.

In revising the Absentee Certificate Envelope, Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) staff took great care to incorporate the additional required information while retaining the standard 11" x 4 3/4" (#12) envelope size. Assuming the suggested privacy envelope is the same size as the current Certificate Envelope (11" x 4 3/4"), in order to accommodate the dimensions of the privacy envelope, the Absentee Certificate Envelope, will have to be larger – at least 5" x 11 1/2" (#14). In order to accommodate the larger Certificate Envelope, the envelope used to mail the ballot and the Certificate and Privacy envelopes to the voter to be increased in size to at least 6" x 12" (#16). The chart below displays the cost per thousand for each size envelope:

Envelope No. and Description	Dimensions	Cost per 1,000
#12 (Current Absentee Certificate Envelope)	11" x 4 3/4"	\$ 74.35
#12 plain (Prospective Privacy Envelope)	11" x 4 3/4"	\$ 55.00
#14 (Current Mailer Envelope, Prospective Absentee Certificate Envelope)	5" x 11 1/2"	\$ 90.00
#16 (Prospective Mailer Envelope)	6" x 12"	\$234.00

In preparation for 2012 when the ID requirements of Act 23 are in effect, municipal clerks have already placed print orders for the revised Absentee Certificate Envelopes. Assuming municipal clerks based the number of Absentee Certificate Envelopes ordered on the number of absentee ballot requests made in the previous presidential election year (2008), the number of absentee ballot requests filled for the general election alone was approximately 686,000. Therefore, the estimated amount already expended on #12 Absentee Certificate Envelopes for 2012 is, conservatively, \$51,000. Since the addition of the privacy envelope will render the #12 certificate envelopes too small, they will be unusable for the purpose intended.

Municipal clerks will have to re-order Absentee Certificate Envelopes in at least a #14 envelope size. Assuming the same 686,000 estimate, the cost of the re-order would be approximately \$61,700.

Privacy Envelopes:

Assuming the privacy envelope will be a plain envelope, the same size as the current Absentee Certificate Envelope (#12), the cost of 686,000 plain envelopes would be approximately \$37,700.

Mailer Envelopes:

In preparation for 2012, municipal clerks have already placed print orders for mailer envelopes in which to mail a ballot and associated materials to absentee voters. Using the 686,000 figure, a conservative estimate of the amount already expended on mailer envelopes (#14) is \$61,700. Since the addition of the privacy envelope necessitates a larger Certificate Envelope, which renders the mailer envelope too small, the #14 envelopes cannot be used as mailers. Municipal clerks will have to re-order larger mailer envelopes (at least a #16), at an estimated cost of \$160,500.

Postage:

Based on a 2 ounce average weight of the mailer envelope containing a ballot, instructions and Certificate Envelope, the average current cost to mail an absentee ballot via 1st class mail to a voter within the U.S. is \$1.18 (64¢ postage out and 44¢ for return postage). The estimated cost of mailing a ballot, instructions, Certificate Envelope and privacy envelope in a "large envelope" (defined by the United States Post Office as being over 11 1/2 inches in length) is \$1.92 (\$1.48 postage out and 44¢ for return postage). The postage cost increase to mail a ballot to one voter is 74¢.

The total number of absentee ballots issued to nonmilitary voters for the 2008 general election was 680,449. Approximately 75 percent (510,337) of nonmilitary voters voted in person in the clerk's office and 25 percent (170,112) were mailed to nonmilitary voters. (Absentee ballots sent to and received from military voters qualify for mailing free of postage under federal free postage laws. Therefore ballots mailed to military voters are not included in the postage cost analysis.)

Number of Ballots	Estimated Current Cost	Estimated Future Cost	Increase
170,112	\$200,700	\$326,600	\$125,900

Below is a chart which sets out start-up costs (2012) by population range and an average cost for municipalities within each range. Statewide, start-up costs would be approximately \$498,443.

Municipalities by Population Range	Number of Municipalities in each Range	Total Number of Nonmilitary Absentee Ballots Issued	Number of Nonmilitary Voters Receiving Ballots by Mail (25% of total)	Losses Due to Unusable Materials (one-time cost)	Cost for Privacy Envelopes	Cost for Larger Mailer and Cert Envelopes	Postage Increase	Total Costs	Average Per Municipality in this Range
>150,000	5	81,542	20,385	\$ 13,450	\$ 4,500	\$ 26,570	\$ 15,085	\$ 59,605	\$11,920
39,000-150,000	15	76,991	19,248	12,735	4,270	25,100	14,243	56,348	3,756
10,000-39,000	133	265,462	66,366	43,925	14,700	86,590	49,111	194,326	1,461
<10,000-	1754	256,454	64,113	42,570	14,250	83,900	47,444	188,164	107
Totals	1907	680,449	170,112	\$112,680	\$37,720	\$222,160	\$125,883	\$498,443	

Summary:

The current annual statewide cost of materials and supplies associated with the mailing of absentee ballots is approximately \$313,400. The projected annual statewide cost of privacy envelopes, larger certificate and mailer envelopes and increased postage is approximately \$586,500. This is an increase in annual cost of approximately \$273,100.

Materials and Supplies Current

Costs Projected

Costs Increase

Costs

Certificate Envelopes \$ 51,000 \$ 61,700 \$10,700

Privacy Envelopes - 0 - 37,700 37,700

Mailer Envelopes \$ 61,700 160,500 98,800

Postage \$200,700 \$326,600 125,900

Total \$313,400 \$586,500 \$273,100

Long-Range Fiscal Implications

See the "Summary" above.